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C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000377

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/29/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS LAYS OUT NEW PLAN FOR
COORDINATION

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA), Zainab Bangura, convened a meeting of Chiefs of Missions and heads of UN agencies on July 22 to provide updates on the Government of Sierra Leone's (GoSL) activities, as well as provide a forum for the diplomatic corps to raise questions and concerns. The Minister of Finance provided a brief review of pending issues. Minister Bangura intends to regularly convene these meetings every other month, and will invite other government ministers to attend and make presentations to the corps. This initiative will hopefully address the limited coordination with and amongst donors. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Minister Bangura convened the diplomatic corps on July 22 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss issues of relevance and to moderate a brief discussion period. Besides Ambassador Perry, representatives from most diplomatic missions, including the United Kingdom, European Commission, Germany, China, Guinea, Ghana, The Gambia, Liberia, Libya, and Iran were in attendance. The Executive Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the heads of such UN agencies as UNICEF and UNDP, also attended.

¶3. (C) The Minister outlined pending issues to the group. These included the need for meeting requests with President Koroma to be relayed via the MFA, and the planned expansion of the GoSL diplomatic presence abroad to include missions in Brazil, India, and Senegal. Minister Bangura also provided updates on the anti-narcotics and anti-corruption legislation. She indicated that both should be passed, likely by the President signing Certificates of Emergency, this week (NOTE: Neither pieces of legislation have been signed or enacted as of July 28. END NOTE). The Minister used the forum to remind the group that the GoSL recognized Kosovo independence, and to praise the President for his stance on the situation in Zimbabwe. She intends to reconvene the group every other month, and will request that other Ministers make presentations on sectoral topics of interest to the participants.

¶4. (C) Minister of Finance David Carew discussed several issues of concern to his ministry and the assembly. In particular, he stated that funding has been secured to improve the road conditions between Freetown and Lungi International Airport, which he believes will have a beneficial impact for encouraging investment. He also noted his awareness that humanitarian assistance and goods have been inappropriately subjected to duties as of late, and that he will be addressing this issue with the National Revenue Authority.

¶5. (C) Members of the diplomatic corps thanked the Minister for her initiative in calling the meeting, and briefly mentioned topics of interest for future discussions. These topics include: re-branding the country's image from one of "post-conflict" to "developing;" difficulties encountered

receiving timely information from the MFA about official delegations to various conferences and events (NOTE: Though this topic was raised by the Egyptian Ambassador, it has been problematic for the Mission as well. Information regarding the AGOA Forum delegation, for example, was provided to Emboffs at the last-minute, in a piecemeal fashion. Complete information regarding their delegation was never received, despite repeated requests for more than two months. END NOTE); and concerns about the quality of local media reporting.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Regular meetings with the MFA and diplomatic corps will be a useful means of ensuring that all have the same information about certain issues, as well as assist with coordinating initiatives. It also provides an opportunity for common problems amongst the missions, such as inappropriate taxation, to be raised with the MFA. Minister Bangura's comments about keeping the MFA in the loop in terms of Presidential communications were strident, and appeared to be borne of frustration that appropriate protocols have not been followed in recent months. While such frustration is legitimate, it must be noted that ineffective handling of requests, resulting in meetings being moved or canceled, are likely the reason that Missions have stopped following normal procedures. This meeting is a hopeful sign that the MFA is starting to address its internal problems related to limited capacity and lack of operating guidelines. Such changes will benefit bilateral relationships and enable the Ministry to take an active role in encouraging collaboration between donors. END COMMENT.
PERRY